

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN HOMILETIC MAGAZINE.

VOL. VIII.

MARCH, 1910.

No. 3.

The Lutheran Confirmation.

(Cf. JOSH. 24, 15.)

In the 24th chapter of the Book of Joshua we are told that Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. Having enumerated the many benefits of God which they had received, and having admonished them to serve the true God, Joshua renewed the covenant of the Lord with the people, saying: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," v. 15. "And the people said," etc., v. 24. But Joshua asked them first to consider that it is not so easy after all, as they had thought, to serve the Lord, who severely punishes the backsliders, vv. 19—24. Nevertheless they chose God, their Lord.

You, my dear catechumens, being God's children by His grace, will also to-day, as Israel in former times, have the privilege of choosing. To you in particular the words of our text are spoken: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve!"—"No man can serve two masters. . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Here is your choice between God and the world, between death and life, between the curse and the blessing. It is likely that you will also at once say with Israel: "The Lord, our God, will we serve, and His voice will we obey." And that is proper, and your intention may be as good as that of the children of Israel. Let us, however, not forget the warning of Joshua; for it is not always such an easy matter to serve the Lord; there will be many difficulties; many and mighty are the foes of your salvation, the devil, the world, and your own flesh, who will always try to obstruct your way and tempt you to break your covenant with God. Pause, therefore, before you make your solemn vow, and consider once more earnestly THE LUTHERAN CONFIRMATION, with its *Biblical principles, Christian requirements, and divine blessing.*

In the ancient church confirmation was administered immediately after baptism by the bishop by laying on of hands, if he was present; if he was not present at the baptism, confirmation was delayed. In our Lutheran church the age for confirmation generally is fourteen or fifteen years. Although confirmation is not directly commanded by God in so many words, and though it is no sacrament, yet the Lutheran confirmation is pleasing to the Lord; for everything which we do at confirmation is commanded in the Word of God. We also have some examples of confirmation in the early Christian Church recorded in the New Testament: Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel, "confirming the souls of the disciples," Acts 14, 22. "And Judas and Silas . . . confirmed them," Acts 15, 32. "And he . . . confirming the churches," Acts 15, 41; cf. 18, 23.

The Lutheran confirmation is pleasing to God and necessary, not because it has become an established custom in our church, but, as already stated, because everything which we do at our confirmation is commanded by God and is founded in Holy Scriptures.

I. Firstly, confirmation is a *confession of Christ*. That is required in the Word of God: Rom. 10, 10. We know, indeed, that above all faith is required in the heart, faith in the things which the mouth confesses, so that the mouth will not confess differently from the faith of the heart. For though it is possible to deceive men, the congregation as well as the pastor, if one would be a hypocrite and confess with the mouth that which the heart does not consent to, it is not possible to deceive God, who knows the thoughts of the heart. For He will not be content with a mere profession of the mouth. The Lord complains: Matt. 15, 8; Is. 29, 3. Be sure, therefore, that your confession comes from the heart. None other He will have, saying: "My son, give me thine heart!" A confession without faith is therefore worthless. But, on the other hand, God also requires that we should confess with our mouth that faith which we have in the heart: Matt. 10, 32, 33. So important and necessary, then, is it to confess Christ, that if we do not confess him, Christ will deny us before His Father, and that means: we will be condemned. How are we, then, to confess Christ? Above all, by believing in Him in our hearts; thus we confess Him before God. But also by confessing Him with the mouth, as here to-day (Rom. 10, 10), and in our lives: Matt. 5, 16. This is "before men;" for they cannot see our faith.

II. Secondly, the thorough *instruction* in the biblical truths, which precedes the final act of confirmation, is in accordance with the Word of God. Above all let us bear in mind that our dear Lord and Savior has Himself closely joined the teaching of His Word to baptism, saying: "Go ye therefore and *teach all nations*," etc., Matt. 28, 19, 20. Since *all* are to be baptized, *all* should be instructed.

This is, in the first place, directly and immediately effected by the Holy Ghost at the baptism of the child, when it is taught to believe, and is given a new heart. "For as many of you," etc., Gal. 3, 27. But in the second place, it is God's will that we should, according to the example of Christ, increase in wisdom as in stature, Luke 2, 52. When the child grows in stature, we should also teach and instruct it that it may increase in wisdom and knowledge, according to His command: 2 Pet. 3, 18; Col. 3, 16. If we had no confirmation and no previous preparation for it, then it is to be feared that a great many would never learn their Catechism and, consequently, at best only have a superficial knowledge of the Bible. Too much stress cannot be laid on a *thorough* instruction in the Catechism. The apostles also laid stress on the teachings: 2 Tim. 3, 14, 15; Acts 15, 32. The real confirmation *in faith* and in the *sound doctrine* is not so much accomplished by the ceremonies on confirmation-day as by the earnest and thorough instruction in the Word of God, given previously, the confirmation-act being the crown and seal of the work. The Lutheran confirmation, properly speaking, is not a feature of a couple of hours merely on confirmation-day; it is the appropriation of the teachings of God in the Bible through the grace of the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ. Thus the Lutheran confirmation is attended by *divine blessing* for time and eternity.

III. Thirdly, our confirmation is pleasing to God because of the *examination*; for the Word of God requires this before partaking of the Lord's Supper. To persons who are regarded in the church as being of age and who become partakers of all the blessings of the congregation, the command of God is: "*Let a man examine himself,*" etc., 1 Cor. 11, 28. A person who is *unable* to examine himself is not a worthy guest at the Lord's table. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily," etc., v. 29. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance, both that he who desires to partake of the Lord's Supper should be instructed *sufficiently*, so that he shall be *able* to examine himself, as the Scriptures demand, and also that he publicly confess and testify that he *will* examine himself; for how could the congregation, to whom God has given His holy sacraments, and the pastor, who in God's stead has been entrusted to administer them,—how could they do this in accordance with God's will, if they should not require that which the Word of God requires: confession?—It is also of the greatest importance that the pastor gain the confidence of the young and become well acquainted with them, as this will better enable him to comfort and assist them in time of trials and trouble; thereby they are also more firmly joined to the congregation.

IV. Fourthly, the confirmation-vow is also pleasing to God. Joshua let Israel make a vow in the presence of the Lord. And he himself said: "Choose you . . . *serve the Lord,*" Josh. 24, 15. And

they made a covenant that they would serve the Lord. In the Book of Psalms God has *commanded*: "Vow, and pay unto the Lord, your God," Ps. 76, 11. God desires that we make such vows as are in accordance with His commandments, and that is the case with the confirmation-vow. For this vow is neither more nor less than a repetition of the baptismal covenant which God Himself made with us: Mark 16, 16. But as it is in the nature of faith that a believer cannot continue with any sin known to him, but will abandon and resist every sin, so faith enables him to live a new life for God. It is impossible to be a believer and not to fight against the devil. If a person, accordingly, promises to believe, then he *thereby* agrees to resist the devil. Furthermore, if faith shall attain its final end, eternal salvation, then it becomes necessary to *continue* in this faith unto the end: Rev. 3, 11; 2, 10.

In our baptismal covenant we have not promised more than that which is *absolutely necessary to salvation*. And *this same promise* is renewed at confirmation. The only apparent difference is, that in baptism the sponsors answered for us, while at confirmation one answers with his own lips and takes the responsibility more directly. Confirmation is not to improve upon baptism, nor to make that effective; for baptism is in itself effective and sufficient. But most people may have broken their baptismal vow before the age for confirmation, and for that reason also it should be renewed. Besides, if one has *not broken* it, it is proper and pleasing to God that we *remember the covenant and renew our promises*, as did Israel, Josh. 24.

V. *To pray for others* is likewise founded in the Bible: "Confess your faults one to another, and *pray one for another*," etc., James 5, 16; 1 Tim. 2, 1.

VI. Even *the kneeling down* before the altar is an act pleasing to God and commanded by Him: "That at the name of Jesus *every knee should bow . . . every tongue should confess*," etc., Phil. 2, 10, 11.

When man is asked to choose his God, it is obvious that the only choice which God desires us to make is to choose Him. He is not indifferent. But in the sense that God does not force His love upon any one, He leaves it free to us to accept Him or not,—and by accepting Him we return His love. He who is baptized has already promised the same things: he has made his choice before. Viewing it from that side, his "choice" at confirmation really amounts to this: It is our duty to adhere to our former choice and pledge. Will we now be honest and faithful, or go back on our word? Thus with Israel also.

Many people hesitate in making the promise required at confirmation because they fear they cannot keep it. But this is an unfounded fear, for by the grace of God it is possible to keep it: Phil. 4, 13. It is to be noted that neither in baptism nor at confirma-

tion does the Christian promise to be perfect or without sin; for such a promise we could never keep: Phil. 3, 12. But we promise in confirmation simply that we will renounce, abandon, and resist sin in every form, and that we will believe in the Triune God. And to do this (resist sin and believe) we do not promise by our own power (for then it would again be impossible), but we promise it by the grace of God. Now if any one does not intend to try to keep this promise, then he should never make it. But in that case, what are we at? Can such a one be saved who will not resist sin, who will not believe? Consider this question earnestly for God's sake!—Moreover, it is also included in this covenant, that if one should ever break his pledge, then he shall again receive grace, provided he repents and returns to the good covenant of God; for if we are unfaithful, He remains faithful, and shall always be glad to receive to His bosom a lost but truly repenting sinner.—Now, on which side is the advantage? In a covenant two (or more) parties generally agree on certain things and make pledges to each other for favors in return. But here God promises: 1. to take away all your sins and every evil, and 2. to give you faith and everything good. Man promises: 1. to let God take away his sins and every evil, and 2. to let God give him faith and everything good, and to preserve him therein unto eternal salvation, out of pure grace. The covenant therefore seems to be altogether one-sided, in favor of man. A person who would not gladly make such a covenant with God, when He offers it to him, surely does not know what is good for himself.

But you, my dear catechumens, when, in the name of your God, I now put the question to you: "Choose you this day whom you will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,"—you will with joy and thanksgiving give your heart to the Lord, saying: "The Lord, my God, will I serve, and His voice will I obey."

(Here follows the confirmation-act.)

So the promise has been given and the covenant renewed on your part, beloved children: You will serve the Lord, your God, and obey His voice. Listen, then, once more, ere you depart, to the voice of your Lord, and perceive His fatherly admonition to you on the way:

"Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord, your God, which He made with you," Deut. 4, 23. Now you are considered grown up; presently you must depart into a cold and unfriendly world. Your childhood days, with the joys and pleasures of the old home, are past. There will be no loving father, no tender mother to accompany you, to guide and advise and comfort you; you will be surrounded by strangers, who care for themselves and not for you. Many a sorrow and disappointment will be your lot. Life is not always as beautiful as you may think.—Where, then,

will you be able to find a faithful and true friend, who always will be with you and assist you? Listen to the familiar voice of your Lord, who Himself offers to accompany and assist you. He is faithful; He never will leave those who will be His own; for He has so loved you that He gave His life for you upon the cross. He is almighty, always able to rescue. Such a friend and companion is the one most needed. And He will be yours! He will never forsake you as long as you "do not forget the covenant of the Lord, your God, which He has made with you."

In order, then, that you may not forget Him, it is necessary that you diligently hear His voice in the Word and Sacraments; you must daily read the Word of God in your Bible, regularly attend the church-services, and often go to the Lord's Supper, in order to receive from these means of grace new power and strengthening of your faith. And every day you must speak to your intimate Friend through prayer. When you thus "take heed, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord, your God, which He has made with you," you shall "know that the Lord, thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations," Deut. 7, 9.

You fathers and mothers, who now again have delivered your son and your daughter to such a faithful friend, our Lord and God, who has taken your child into a covenant with Himself and promised to protect it, you have indeed every reason to thank God. But although your child now is considered of age (in the church), you are still to remain its father and mother. Do continue to advise and guide it unto everything good as much as you have opportunity. And remember that here example is most efficient. Do not forget to pray for your child, whether it remains at home or goes abroad. Pray that God may preserve it in the good covenant throughout life.

You, dearly beloved members of the congregation, also have reason to thank God and rejoice on this happy day; for again the Lord has by confirmation added some dearly bought souls unto the congregation. Let it now be your earnest endeavor that the Word of God always may be preached in its purity in your midst, and that the Sacraments may be rightly administered, so that these precious souls which the Lord has entrusted to your care may be nourished and preserved in the covenant and community with their God.

Finally also a word to you, who perhaps do not belong to our congregation, but who have come to celebrate with us here to-day. Let every one of us inquire: "What about my own covenant, which I made in baptism? Have I kept the promise? Have I taken heed, lest I should forget the covenant of the Lord, my God, which He made with me also?" Blessed are you if that be the case! But if

you have broken the covenant and have forfeited His grace, then do now seize the opportunity to remember and renew your pledge; for even to-day the Savior is extending His arms of mercy to every one who turns to His paternal heart in contrition and faith. — Do you perhaps anxiously ask: How may I find Him? The answer He gave Himself: "The Word is nigh thee," etc. Rom. 10, 8—10. Amen.

K. HOVDE.

Easter Sermon on Luke 24, 1—12.

The children of the world look upon Christians as poor deluded people who do not realize what true happiness is, who pass through life without any joy. They imagine that rejoicing is foreign to a Christian, and that he who accepts Christianity must forever relinquish all joys.

We Christians indeed avoid all sinful, doubtful joys of the world, but nevertheless we are happy and have many occasions for rejoicing and many reasons to be happy. For example, is not Christmas a day of special joy and happiness for all true Christians? Who would say that on Christmas Eve there is no joy, real joy, among them? What else do the beaming faces of thousands of children on Christmas Eve signify? What do the resounding songs plainly tell? Do those children appear to have abandoned all joys? And on Christmas morning, when we hear the angel's message of the wonderful birth of the child Jesus at Bethlehem, does it seem as though the hearts of Christians were devoid of all true happiness? Indeed not; moreover, we see tears of joy even in the eyes of those whose forms are bent with age and hard toil.

O ye children of the world, who believe that dance and wine alone are the sources of real joy, do not deem us unhappy mortals, but know that, although we weep, we also rejoice. We have many reasons for rejoicing and being happy. Of such reasons we hear on Easter morning. Hence, let us consider:

WHY IS EASTER A DAY OF SPECIAL JOY AND THANKSGIVING
TO ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS?

1. *It is a day of joy because of the great victory Christ has gained for us.*
2. *It is a day of special thanksgiving because of the great sacrifice on the part of Jesus to gain the victory.*

1.

The time that passed between the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ was not a time of rejoicing for the faithful adherents of Jesus, but a time of mourning and of sorrow. On that memorable Friday evening, when the beloved Master had closed His eyes in

death, His few faithful followers gathered about the cross to show Him the last act of kindness. They would lay the bruised, bleeding remains into a place of peaceful rest. Tenderly this is done. A last sorrowful glance is taken at the Master, now wrapped in white grave-cloths; the door of the sepulcher is securely closed, and mournfully they leave, for their hope has been buried with the Master. As the disciples who were on their way to Emmaus said on the day of Christ's resurrection: "But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," so these followers, who escorted Him to His last resting place, had hoped He would redeem Israel, but now their hope was blasted, for the Redeemer was dead.

Hence on Sunday morning, when the women came to the sepulcher, they did not expect to hear about a glorious victory the Master had won over all His and our enemies, but they expected to find Him where they had placed Him. How surprised they must have been when upon entering the grave the angels said: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." With these words the angels told the women that Christ had triumphed over Satan, sin, death, and the grave.

Friends, of all the great victories the world has ever heard this is the greatest. Oh, who can adequately depict the greatness, the gloriousness of this victory? Though we could speak with tongues of angels, we could not do justice to this victory, as the enemies were so mighty, the victory is so overwhelming and complete, the fruits are so far-reaching.

Why did Christ, the Son of God, come into the world? To redeem mankind from sin; to take the awful curse of sin from man. How beautiful man was when he came forth from the hands of God, perfect in body, clean in heart, holy and righteous, and behold how sin has degraded him, almost beyond recognition! So fearfully has sin debased him that to-day many of the wise do not look upon him as coming from the hand of God, but as a descendant of the brute. And more than that, through sin man has lost the love of God and has become subject to His wrath, to temporal and eternal death, as St. Paul says: Rom. 5, 12. This awful curse Christ came to conquer, and by His resurrection He proclaimed to the world that this has been done. Henceforth we may rejoice: Rom. 8, 33. 34. Sin cannot condemn or enslave us, but by the strength we have gained through faith in Christ we conquer it. Christ has paid a ransom for us, and if we trust in Christ through faith, sin cannot condemn us. He who believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life, as Jesus teaches us.

Sin no longer having any power over a believer, the consequences of sin, death, and the grave can no longer strike terror in his heart. It is true, we must all see death, but to a true believer death has lost its hideousness. Death may come and take the little darling

from its fond mother's arms, or it may claim the youth in the bloom of life, or it may reduce helpless children to orphans, but it is no longer a curse resting upon the believer. Christ has borne the curse for us. His death upon the cross removed the sting of death. Because of the death of His Son, God looks upon all believers as though they themselves had died for their sins. Consequently, death is not a curse, but a blessing to every believer, for through death he enters eternal life. Friends, because of Christ's victory we rejoice in the very face of death: 1 Cor. 15, 55. 57.

But is not the grave too awful to contemplate? Is not the thought of lowering a loved one into its walls of clay a grewsome one? Oh, my friends, if the message of the angels: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is risen!" were not true, then, indeed, the grave would be grewsome, for St. Paul says: 1 Cor. 15, 17—18. But Christ is risen and the grave is conquered; it must give up its dead. The remains of a Christian are indeed lowered into the grave, but the soul is carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Nor is the body to remain there; on the contrary, as Jesus was raised from the dead, so our bodies will be raised on Judgment Day, to be reunited with the soul and to live in bliss and happiness forever. "For this corruptible," etc., 1 Cor. 15, 53.

Friends, we see, in Christ Jesus all our enemies have been conquered, and because our Savior comes forth triumphantly on Easter Morn, this day is a day of special joy for us. How could we do otherwise than rejoice when we hear that all our enemies have been conquered?

But, beloved in Christ, to gain such a victory cost the Savior dearly. It was not a small sacrifice He made to gain the victory.

2.

How did Christ gain such a signal victory? "Remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." Here the angel tells us briefly of the great sacrifice the Savior made in our behalf. This brings the Son of Man before our vision particularly in the last hours of His life, in His fearful death-struggle with our enemies. We see Him in the garden of Gethsemane writhing in agony; we see Him before the high priest, mocked and abused; we see Him before Pilate, unmercifully scourged and wearing a crown of thorns; we see Him on Calvary, nailed to the cross. Not because He had merited such vile and cruel treatment,—He was spotless, pure, and holy,—but in order to take the wrath of God from us which we had deserved, did He suffer thus; He suffered in our stead.

Do you see Him, the Son of Man, in the little ship which is being tossed about on a furious sea, extending His hand and by

a single word calming the wild waves? Do you see Him at Nain, taking the young man's hand, who is being carried out as a corpse, and bringing him back to life? Do you see Him on the mountain side, feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and a few fish? There you see Him as the very God and Man.

Now behold Him in the garden of Gethsemane, so completely prostrated and weak that an angel from heaven must come to succor Him. Must it not be an awful burden this Almighty Man is bearing? Christians often think that Christ's sufferings were only external. Great indeed were His sufferings in His body. We need only think of the inhuman treatment He received at the hands of the cruel soldiers, of the thorns that pierced His brow, of the scourging He received before Pilate, and of the way His hands and feet were pierced by spikes.

But in after years, we see a great many of His followers suffering the same ignominious death. Some were burned on a pyre, some crucified, even with their heads down. We can hardly believe a human body could stand the tortures some of the followers of Christ were put to, yet though their sufferings seem to be on a parallel with those of Christ, His were infinitely greater. His sufferings were mainly anguish and agony of the soul. We know how a deep-seated trouble eats at our very heart. Now think of the burden of sin resting on Him, and you may imagine the condition of His soul. Oh, who can understand the mighty conflict taking place in His bosom! The fires of hell were burning in His heart. The tortures which we ought to have suffered for our sins, the tortures which made the rich man wail: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame," caused His sweat to fall to the ground as drops of blood. Not the nails piercing His hands and feet only, but the curse of God that rested upon sin made Him call loudly: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Friends, could His sufferings have been greater? Could He have sacrificed more than He did? Did He not give all, even His life, as a sacrifice? "But He was wounded for our transgressions," etc., Is. 53, 5.

Truly, great was His sacrifice to gain the victory for us. Ought not Easter be a day of special thanksgiving? Indeed, as does the psalmist, so let us raise our hearts and voices in praise and thanksgiving, saying: Ps. 126, 3. And again: Ps. 103, 1, 2.

Finally, dear friends, take heed of what the angel says: "Remember how He spake unto you!" The thanksgiving which is most pleasing to Him is to remember Him in true faith. Accept Him as your Savior, then Easter will be a day of great joy and thanksgiving, and you will inherit the fruits of His victory, eternal life. (Hymn 93, 6.) Amen.

G. W. F.

Outlines for Lenten Sermons.

WORDS FROM THE CROSS.

IV.

MATT. 27, 46.

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

In the three words considered Jesus paid no attention to His own sufferings. In the jaws of death He cared for others. First, He prayed for His most bitter enemies. Then He satisfied the pleading soul of the malefactor. Lastly, He provided comfort and help for His mother and for His disciple. Beginning with the fourth word, He turns to His own great agony.

How He suffered! His skin and flesh was torn by a scourge; hands and feet pierced by nails; head wounded by crown of thorns; His heart aching because of the bitter ingratitude of His people. Intense suffering. Yet, if this were all! Upon Him lay the sin of the world and its eternal punishment. The throes of the death of all, eternal death, hell's torture, must He endure, for without it is no redemption. Yes, the hour has come when it is fulfilled: "The pains of hell gat hold upon me," Ps. 116, 3. God's wrath in its fullness, the hiding of His face, is upon Jesus.

Since the sixth hour, twelve o'clock noon, darkness had covered the earth, with increasing intensity, until the ninth hour. Darker and darker the shadows of death were encompassing Jesus. Out of this darkness, out of the depths, "about the ninth hour," Jesus cries "with a loud voice": "My God," etc.

1. It is a word of mystery.

We cannot understand it in its fullness and its depth. Jesus is God. How could God forsake Himself? Know not. But the fact is declared and dare not be abridged or denied.

Many explanations are utterly inadequate. It has been said these words are words of the psalmist, and that Jesus, by using them, desired to declare His own prophetic character. Euthemius says that Jesus by these words desired to give evidence of the reality of His sufferings, as against the Valentinians and Marcionites. Origen thinks that Jesus, just at the time of the utterance of this word, was chagrined at the fact that in reality only a few of those for whom He was dying would reap the benefit, and that therefore He asks the question. Theophylactus says Jesus is demonstrating how much nature abhors death. Bede says Jesus is indicating that He cannot suffer any more. And so on. Such thoughts can never satisfy us; they all come short of the plain statement.

Words of mystery, but a plain statement of a fact, a necessary fact for us. If not a fact, sin's debt remains unpaid.

2. *It is a word declarative of the nature of His suffering at the time.*

Forsaken of God. Heaven's bliss is in Scripture described as "being with God." So also Jesus to malefactor. This is the only soul-satisfying condition. Conversely, damnation, hell's condemnation, is "to be away from, without God." This latter condition begins under sin in this world and is continued in intensified and confirmed form in hell. Forsaken of God, no hope, this is the state of hell.

This condemnation is upon our substitute, Jesus. The pains of hell have gotten hold upon Him. Out of this depth He cries: "My God," etc.

3. *It is a word declarative of the reality of the divine judgment upon Him.*

Forsaken of God. God is imposing the bitter cup. God is exacting the price of sin. Divine, offended righteousness is laying on judgment. God is acting.

"Forsaken me." Jesus is drinking the bitter cup, etc. Jesus is satisfying the judgment against the world, against Him.

Yes, He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Sacrificial Lamb. God sacrifices. The Lamb is sacrificed.

4. *It is a word of hope.*

Bitter suffering, but no despair. Still He cries to God. Yes, "my" God. True, not father now, He is before His Judge. Nevertheless, "my" God. From those lips every word is significant.

Why? Only one answer: "God so loved the world." "So," boundless.

"In order that . . . might not perish." Might have hope, *the* hope, "everlasting life."

a. Never forget what sin is and what is its consequence. Final consequence. Forsaken of God.

b. Never forget what God's love has done for you. What are you doing for Him who so loved you?

"Lord, Thou hast the words of eternal life," John 6, 68.

V.

JOHN 19, 28.

"I thirst."

These last words follow in quick succession. It is the climax of suffering. The end is being reached.

He who directs the waters above and the waters beneath the earth, who sends the streams into the valleys and the springs into the mountains, who sways the mighty ocean, He says: "I thirst." How is this possible?

True, looking to His human nature only, it is easily plausible. He had last tasted the wine many hours before, in that upper room.

He had talked with the disciples long upon the way to the garden. Intense sorrow of soul and great anguish, so that "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," had exhausted Him in Gethsemane. For hours He had endured trial before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, Pilate again. He had carried His cross and had suffered great scorn. For six hours He has been hanging upon the cross, His blood flowing from His many wounds. Such exhaustion causes thirst.

Note the thirst of Samson when with great exertion he had slain the thousand Philistines: "And he was sore athirst," etc., Judges 15, 18. How immeasurably severer was the battle that Jesus fought! Yes, Jesus is martyred. His body is being overcome by weakness. Thirst is consuming Him. Also the thirst of death.

And more. Out of hell He had cried: "My God," etc. Out of hell He cries: "I thirst." He is suffering the thirst of hell. Rich man to Abraham. There no drop of water to cool his tongue. Jesus thirsts the hellish thirst for the world.

But this Jesus is the God-man. And the God-man thirsts, hence the infinite value of that thirst. Precious fact again, clearly stated, but to us inscrutable.

No matter if we do not know the "how" since we know the fact. The Mouth of Truth and Love has said it. It is fulfilled: "My strength is dried up," etc., Ps. 22, 15.

1. Scripture is fulfilled. God's plan for our salvation was laid down in Scripture. Jesus knew the Scripture, surprised the doctors in the temple when a child. He knew what He had to suffer, Luke 18, 31 f. He knew now that all things were accomplished: cf. v. 28. Jesus is the central character of the Bible, its Alpha and Omega. Search the Scriptures!

2. Jesus, our suffering Brother, thirsted. Comfort. Tried like we. Shall we thirst and He not have pity? Come boldly before the throne. Note: Hagar and Ishmael: still "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him." Israel in the wilderness, two times dying of thirst: the Rock of Ages is still the water of life. Elijah: the Lord still "dwelleth in the thick darkness," and "joy still cometh in the morning." The "Good Shepherd" leadeth "beside the still waters."

3. Jesus, our dying Brother, thirsted. In that awful moment, think of Him. He will be with thee. Fear not.

4. Jesus, our Savior, thirsted. Forsaken, hell's anguish and pain, its thirst He tasted for us, all of us, the world. Fear not. Abraham's bosom, heaven, is ours.

5. They gave Him vinegar to drink. Miserable relief. What givest thou? Miserable devotion, adoration, service. Oh, with all thy heart fall down before His cross. Such love demands thine all.

VI.

JOHN 19, 30.

"It is finished."

We are approaching the end. One by one we have contemplated Jesus' last words; soon His lips will be sealed in death. He who prayed for His enemies, comforted the dying malefactor, provided for His bereaved mother and His disciple, suffered the forsaken state and the thirst of hell, He is now approaching the moment when triumph or defeat shall crown His work. Realize it and with fluttering heart wait expectantly. Glory to God! Praise be to the Lamb! For with a loud voice, thundering the doom of sin, death, and hell, Jesus cries from the cross: "It is finished." This is the sixth word.

1. Finished is His life.

A wonderful, mysterious life. Wonderful, etc., in prophecy. Beginning with the first word of prophecy concerning Him, all through Scripture He is the Wonderful, the Mystery of Godliness. Woman's Seed. Isaiah: "A virgin shall conceive," etc., "name Immanuel," ch. 7, 14. — Wonderful, etc., in His coming. Angels' messages; wise men from the East; Simeon; voice from heaven; baptism; revelation of Trinity there. — Wonderful, etc., in His acts. Miracles, wisdom, transfiguration, trial, death. It is finished, this life.

A life of love. So in prophecy. Shepherd, Is. 40; Ps. 23. So in His acts. Life of continuous loving service to those in any need. A loving teacher at every step. It is finished, this life.

A life of sadness. Prophetically. The man of sorrows, etc., cf. Is. 53. From birth to death. "No room for Him in the inn" when He came. Herod. Bleak Nazareth. Persecuted always. Passion. "Behold the man." It is finished, this tragic life.

2. Finished is His work.

The *covenant* work of the Father promised in the beginning. Gen. 3, 15: "I," God, "will put enmity," etc. The work concerning which God spake in times past through His holy prophets. The *entire* work, "all things spoken of by the prophets concerning the Son of Man," Luke 18, 31 f. Note especially such as Is. 53. Yes, the promised, prophesied covenant work.

The *saving* work *attributed* to Jesus at His birth. Angel to Mary. Angel to the shepherds. Simeon in the temple.

The "Father's business" *claimed* by the child Jesus when as a child of discretion for the first time at Jerusalem and in the temple.

The work *attested* at His baptism, the beloved Son, the Lamb of God.

The work of *which He spake* when, at the beginning of His public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, He testified that Is. 61 was fulfilled in Him.

The work of which He, on His first journey during His public ministry, about three years before the time, spake to Nicodemus, John 3. "As Moses lifted up," etc. "God so loved," etc.

The work of which He spake to His disciples at the end of His public ministry, Luke 18, 31 f.

Yes, the work for which He came and which He was ever conscious of doing, no unexpected, but the promised covenant work, is finished.

Hear well. This is *God's work for fallen man*. God has sent the Woman's Seed, has thereby "put enmity," the enmity that shatters the harmony, between the deceiver and the deceived. The Savior's heel has been bruised, He has suffered, yea, the pains of hell. Satan's head has been crushed; his dominion over man has been broken; he has been vanquished. In short, the debt of sin has been paid, all righteousness has been fulfilled. The world is saved. Jesus "is" now the Savior.

3. Finished is our lot and hope.

We are saved sinners. Are that now. Reconciled with the Father now. Lift up the head, God's face shines upon us.

Paradise regained is ours. Death's sting, sin, is overcome. The grave has been despoiled of its victory. Ours is the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 15. Our hearts even now are beating triumphal marches to our everlasting home.

Happy lot, we are saved.

Glorious hope, "there is a rest for the children of God."

Cling to this word through life. In death. It is finished: Jesus "is" our perfect Savior.

VII.

LUKE 23, 46.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

The day on which we commemorate the death of Jesus. Our eyes are turned towards Golgotha and its cross. Our hearts linger in love with the crucified Lamb of God. We know, all this He did for us. He for us. In all of it is He the Christ, Jesus, the Savior of the world.

During this passion season we have stood regularly beneath the cross. We have contemplated the suffering, dying Savior's last words. One by one. Lo, the word with which He opened His lips upon that cross is the word with which He closes them: "Father."

1. See here peace after the strife.

Strife. The battle made necessary the moment when sin, Satan, had enthralled mankind. The battle for freedom, for pardon, for

justification, for the mansions lost. The battle laid upon Him when He was made sin for us, 2 Cor. 5, 21. The battle of Calvary.

May we not overlook it! It was for us He suffered so, He battled so.

But it is finished. The strife over, He returns to the Father, to the glory that was His, and is His, with the Father. The appeased Father!

Oh, the peace in that word now: "Father." The ever Father, whom none can change; "who sitteth in the heavens;" who laughs in the face of all His enemies, Ps. 2; who begat the Son in eternity, Ps. 2. "Father, into Thy," etc. "Thy hands," place of impregnable safety. "My spirit," weary but indomitable, divine. Mystery. "I commend," I do it, consciously, confidently. Peace here.

In effect: Now it is finished. The great work from the beginning of the world, the work decreed by Thee, the Father, promised by Thee to the world, of which all the Scripture testifies, which was to make good all the loss through sin, to which Thou didst choose me and give me, for which I came: this work is finished, therefore I am ready to return to Thee. I now commend my spirit to Thee. My body shall yet hallow the grave as a resting-place; I will manifest myself the Savior to his Satanic majesty, by resurrection to the world, but the work is done, the battle fought, the victory won. Now for Thy glory, the glory in which the penitent malefactor shall to-day behold me. Now for the peace, the rest of heaven.

Oh, see Him at peace!

2. *See here light in the darkness of death.*

Is Jesus not dying? Yes, His head is bending in death. Few hours and they will lay Him into the grave. He is passing through the valley of the shadow of death.

However, see the light that shineth in the darkness. He has already paid the price: in Gethsemane, death's agony; upon the cross, the pains of hell. Death is now only a form; its nature is changed, its terror is gone. Hear Him: "Father," etc. His body enters death, the grave; not so His soul, His spirit. It soars into the heavenly heights.

Precious light! The soul in the Father's hands. He the Source, the Life, the Refuge. May, then, the body rest in the grave, the soul rests in God. —

The end of the study of these dying words. Words of comfort and life through life to life. May they ever be with us! Yes, may Jesus, who spake them from the pulpit of His cross, be with us in our last hour, and so grant us a blessed end, the end which is but the beginning of the real life, in the home prepared for us.

H. B. H.